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The Monitor's view

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CIA and Chile

Now the facts are coming to light. The Central Intelligence Agency was not the innocent bystander in Chile that the United States Government tried to imply it was at the time of the overthrow of Salvador Allende.

The CIA, it turns out, engaged for years in clandestine activities against the late Chilean President. CIA director William Colby acknowledged in secret testimony to the Congress that some \$8 million had been authorized by a high-level intelligence committee headed by Henry Kissinger to "destabilize" Allende's Marxist government and bring about its downfall after 1970.

The disclosures are shocking and dictate the urgent need for a public scrutiny of national security policies, a reform of CIA functions, and a system of strict accountability for CIA actions. They also point again to the deception practiced by previous administrations.

The State Department sticks by its guns. It stated this week it backs the testimony of high officials who previously told Congress that the U.S. had not intervened in the domestic affairs of Chile after Allende's election.

Clearly the full story has yet to be told. In light of the developing dispute we favor full-scale public hearings into the CIA's role in Chile, as called for by Congressman Michael Harrington.

This is not the first time the CIA has been involved in questionable covert operations against foreign states. Its record includes the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion, the secret war in Laos, and efforts to overthrow governments in Iran and Guatemala. More recently, on the domestic front, it furnished the White House "plumbers" with technical aid and a psychiatric profile of Daniel Ellsberg — acts that violated its mandate.

The record is disturbing.

However distasteful, clandestine operations sometimes are necessary. If a foreign power, for instance, is engaged in activities in a country that could impair American interests, it stands to reason the U.S. must know what it is up to. But gathering information and exposing Communist subversion, say, are one thing. Attempts to undermine or overthrow legitimate governments are quite another.

A distressing aspect of all this is the double standard which the U.S. has set for its international conduct. It apparently is permissible for the CIA to maneuver against local governments which Washington does not like — this is deemed in the national interest. But when the U.S. declines to use its influence to dissuade repressive regimes from antidemocratic excesses — as in South Korea or Greece — this is justified as "non-interference" in another country's internal affairs.

If the CIA is permitted to abet the disintegration of constitutionally elected governments — however unpalatable their ideology — does not the U.S. lose its moral authority to condemn similar subversive action by a Communist power?

The Allende regime was hardly a model for Latin America. But the late President did carry on his Marxist experiment within the constitutional framework. If Washington chose not to render help — except to the Chilean military — that at least was an overt, if debatable, position.

But by colluding in the effort to undermine the Chilean Government by covert means, Washington has only helped destroy the credibility of the argument that Communists should participate in the democratic process rather than seek power through violent means.